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AUTHOR	Osguthorpe, Russell T.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes two cases that illustrate the role of collaborative reflection in developing a culture of inquiry and individual and organizational renewal in school-university partnerships. Three assertions underlie the study: that individual renewal leads to organizational renewal; that developing a culture of inquiry is a prerequisite to the kind of individual renewal that leads to organizational renewal; and that collaborative reflection is essential for developing and sustaining culture. The first section of the paper defines the terms culture of inquiry, collaborative reflection, individual renewal, and organizational renewal. The second section describes two cases in which educators engaged in collaborative reflection (one in a new graduate program on educational inquiry and the other in an established program that involved reading, observing schools, and discussing issues related to education in a democracy). The third section offers a model for individual and organizational renewal that includes the nine elements of collaborative reflection: building trust, making time, nurturing questions, forming groups, taking risks, being patient, giving gifts, accepting offerings, and recognizing results. (Contains 22 references.) (SM)

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The Role of Collaborative Reflection in Developing a Culture of Inquiry in a School-University Partnership: A U.S. Perspective

Russell T. Osguthorpe
Professor of Pedagogy
David O. Mckay School of Education
4458 WSC, Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602

Phone: 801-378-3674
Fax: 801-378-7467
E-mail: russ_osguthorpe@byu.edu

Abstract:

This article describes two cases which illustrate the role of collaborative reflection in developing a culture of inquiry in a school-university partnership. Based upon experiences and observations from the cases, a model of individual and organizational renewal is described. The model includes the following nine elements of collaborative reflection which lead to a culture of inquiry: (1) build trust, (2) make time, (3) nurture questions, (4) form groups, (5) take risks, (6) be patient, (7) give gifts, (8) accept offerings, and (9) recognize results.

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The Role of Collaborative Reflection in Developing a Culture of Inquiry in a School-University Partnership: A U.S. Perspective

In this paper I draw upon extant literature, evaluative data, and experience as a participant oberver in two cases to make the following three assertions:

(1) Individual renewal leads to organizational renewal,

(2) Developing a culture of inquiry is prerequisite to the kind of individual renewal that leads to organizational renewal,

(3) Collaborative reflection is essential for developing and sustaining such a culture.

The paper is divided into three sections: (1) an explanation of the terms *culture of inquiry, collaborative reflection, individual renewal, and organizational renewal,* (2) a description of two cases in which educators engaged in collaborative reflection, and (3) a model of individual and organizational renewal.

What is a Culture of Inquiry?

An organization that has developed a culture of inquiry not only tolerates questions regarding its purposes and functions, it nurtures them. Those who participate in the organization constantly assess its trajectory and their role in helping to achieve its mission. Because participants see themselves as stewards over a particular piece of the larger organization, they often focus their questions on the responsibilities that fall within their unique stewardship. Since all feel responsible for the organization's overall success, however, no question is off limits. For example, teachers in a pubic school might focus the majority of their questions on their own classroom practice, but also feel a responsibility to question school, district, state, and national policies that influence their ability to fulfill their stewardship with individual pupils.

Elements of a culture of inquiry. Several researchers have emphasized the importance of developing a culture of inquiry in professional development schools: (Brubacher, Case, and Reagon, 1994; Lieberman and Miller, 1990; Osguthorpe and Patterson, 1998; and Swanson, 1995). Lieberman and Miller (1990) describe five elements for developing a school culture that

supports inquiry: (1) norms of colleagueship, openness, and trust; (2) opportunities and time for disciplined inquiry; (3) teacher learning of content in context; (4) reconstruction of leadership roles; and (5) networks, collaborations, and coalitions (p. 107).

Lieberman's and Miller's elements of a culture of inquiry are similar in some ways to the basic elements of a democracy as described by Putnam (1993). Putnam suggests that for a democracy to work well, three primary ingredients are essential: "(1) social trust, (2) norms of reciprocity, and (3) networks of civic engagement" (p. 180). Comparing the success of the regional forms of democratic government in Northern Italy with the much less successful ones in Southern Italy, Putnam concludes that the South has not developed the three necessary ingredients for democracy to flourish. People in the North are more likely to trust one another, to give back to someone who gives to them, and to participate in groups for the public good. In other words, the cultures of the South and North are different in these fundamental respects.

In some ways schools are like the regional government organizations in Italy. Some develop cultures based on trust and reciprocity that encourage and nurture inquiry, sharing, and change, while others develop cultures based on compliance, self-interest, and protectionism. Only in the schools with the first type of culture can the individual and the school experience renewal.

What is Collaborative Reflection?

Shön (1983) has shown that "reflection-in-action" is a key to professional preparation and development. Although he makes room in the concept for reflection that extends over a period of time (e.g., the attorney reflecting periodically during a year or more that he is arguing a case), most of Shön's examples of reflection-in-action focus on the decisions that professionals make minute by minute in their practice. He also emphasizes the personal nature of the reflective process. Even when a novice professional may be interacting with an expert mentor, the

emphasis is on the reflection that each does and the influence of that reflection on each one's individual practice.

Collaborative reflection extends beyond the original image of an individual pondering his or her professional practice in isolation. It occurs when two or more individuals, through a process of inquiry, work together to improve their own professional practice, programs in which they are involved, or policies that govern them. The most effective way to encourage such reflection is to give a group of educators a common experience upon which they can reflect--either ideas they read about, observations they make of teaching practice, or change initiatives in which they become engaged. Collaborative reflection is more than simple discussion of a common idea: It is prolonged joint work on the continual process of improving one's practice and the commitment to help others improve theirs. It cannot be accomplished without leaving the confines of one's personal study or the classroom. It requires the kind of effort Palmer (1997) discusses in his book *The Courage to Teach.*

Principles of collaborative reflection. From existing literature and my own experience in school-university partnerships, I have identified the following five principles associated with this concept:

Collaborative reflection is most effective when participants

(1) are invited to pose their own questions,

(2) differ in their professional roles and responsibilities,

(3) embrace the norms of reciprocity inherent in collaborative work,

(4) view collaborative work as one of their basic professional responsibilities,

(5) take risks associated with their own practice, and

(6) extend the results of their reflections beyond the original group.

What Constitutes Individual and Organizational Renewal?

There was a time when professional development for educators consisted of courses completed on university campuses located some distance away from the everyday world of

practice faced by teachers. Current approaches are more likely to recognize the necessity of bringing theory and practice together both literally and figuratively.

In the literal sense, classroom teachers and university professors are now more likely to engage in joint professional development activities on each other's turf. Professors come to public school classrooms and demonstrate new approaches to learning and teaching. And classroom teachers come to universities to contribute more directly to the preparation of novice teachers. In the figurative sense, theory and practice enrich one another as university and school educators enter each other's worlds and make their unique contributions. A theory that does not withstand the test of practice is modified, and practice that fails is lifted by a new idea coming from a theory of learning or teaching.

Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) is speaking of the renewal process when she talks about teachers learning:

> Teachers learn just as their students do: by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see. This kind of learning cannot occur solely in college classrooms divorced from engagement in practice or solely in school classrooms divorced from knowledge about how to interpret practice. . . The 'rub between theory and practice' (Miller and Silvernail, 1994, p. 44) occurs most productively when questions arise in the context of real students and real work in progress where research and disciplined inquiry are also at hand (p. 320).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the meaning of the word *renew* as "to make new again, to refresh, to make spiritually new, to regenerate." Along with Goodlad, I prefer the term *renewal* rather than *reform*. One would seldom use the word *reform* to describe the process of individual teacher improvement, so one might ask why it is a desirable term for schools that are composed of collections of teachers and students. As Goodlad (1999) explains:

> *Renewal* is self-initiated, involves learning from experience, and is a high-order educational endeavor of replacing or adding to behavior or circumstances that the

> individual or collections of individuals perceives as inadequate and less than satisfying. It rarely is self-renewal because renewing organisms and ecosystems tend to seek out relevant support from others. (p. xviii)

As educators share with one another the lessons that they learn, they experience personal renewal and in the process help to renew the organization of which they are a part. Walter Gong has asserted that the "simplest case" of teaching and learning is a three-person case: (1) a teacher, (2) a learner, and (3) another learner who is taught by the first learner (see Murdock, 1980). In other words until the one who learns something passes it on to someone else, the cycle of learning and teaching is incomplete. This is why individual and organizational renewal are inextricably linked. One cannot proceed without the other.

After studying the role of biography in teacher development, Day (1993) concludes that leaders in schools must "enhance individual and organizational growth; encourage individual professional development planning; and promote autonomy within collaborative cultures of interdependency" (p. 230). Each of these conclusions points to the tight link between individual and organizational renewal. Teachers must be given time to reflect, time to share their insights, time to implement changes in their classroom practice. But time is not sufficient in and of itself. There must also be a culture in which inquiry, reflecting, sharing, and change are encouraged and nurtured.

The following two cases illustrate how collaborative reflection contributes to the development of a culture of inquiry, and how a culture of inquiry allows for individual and organizational renewal.

Case One: Educational Inquiry Graduate Program

In the spring of 1996 a group of approximately 15 educators approached our School of Education and asked if they could discuss their proposal for a different type of graduate program in education. During the meeting with the Dean, Associate Dean, and Director of the BYU-

Public School Partnership, one educator, who had been a mentor teacher for students participating in a newly revised elementary teacher education program said:

> We have been working with cohort students now for more than a year. They come to us without many teaching skills, and we see them experience so much growth. We want to experience that same kind of growth, and it would be nice if we could do it in a way that would be recognized by the district. We'd like to work on a master's degree, but we don't want to specialize in reading or special education or counseling—we don't want to be pinned down to one narrow specialty. We want to be free to answer questions that face us every day in the classroom.

The decision was made to invite a small number of experienced teachers to help design a new master's program in educational inquiry--a program that would allow teachers to pursue questions that emerged from their professional practice. I agreed to coordinate the project with the help of one of the teachers who had convened the group. After discussing the nature of the project, eight teachers agreed to participate.

In our first session, we brainstormed topics they would like to see included in a master's program. I compiled the list and had them rank order each entry according to how much time they would like to spend on that particular topic. Some of the rankings were not surprising. For example, most teachers ranked "teaching students with special needs" as their most important topic. I was surprised, however, to see that the second most important item was "improve my writing ability." During our next meeting, I asked the teachers to discuss this item. "Do you really want to spend time improving your writing skills?" I asked. One teacher responded, "We're at point in our careers when we think we might have something to say, but we never have the opportunity to write it down and share it."

We decided to develop a course entitled "Educational Inquiry" which included sections on question identification, study and consultation, writing, and sharing. During the first two weeks of the course, each of the teachers selected a question from his or her own practice--a question that each believed would lead to improved student learning. Two of the teachers, for example,

chose to learn more about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and develop a pamphlet for parents and a guide for other teachers.

At the completion of the course the teachers had developed materials that could be used to help parents of children with ADHD and teachers with children in their classroom who showed evidence of this problem. One of the teachers said:

> When I first started teaching, I would see an ADHD child every couple of years. It was a pretty rare thing. Now I have several in my class every year. And it seems to be getting worse all the time.

As the course progressed, I asked the class members if they would like to develop a proposal for the state meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). Two of the teachers had presented a paper at a national meeting the year before and were eager to write the proposal. Some of the others were less eager, wondering if they were prepared to give a presentation. We worked together on the proposal, submitted it, and it was accepted.

When the time arrived for our session at the conference, each of the teachers described one aspect of the degree program that we were developing and invited discussion from those present. As each teacher completed his or her presentation, I was impressed with the level of professionalism each exhibited.

During our next class period, we discussed our experience at the conference. One teacher said:

> You know, after we dropped you off at your home, just after you closed the car door and went in your house, we all sort of celebrated. We just started screaming, 'we did it, we did it.' That was the first time some of us had ever done anything like that before--I mean give a professional presentation at a meeting like that. We're always in front of kids, and we feel comfortable with them. But we weren't sure how we'd do with other teachers and professors staring back at us.

"So why couldn't you celebrate while I was still in the car?" I asked. "Why did you have to wait until I left?"

"I guess because you're an old hand at this. We felt silly making a big deal about something that probably wasn't a big deal for you. But for us it was definitely a big deal."

I asked the teachers they would each write down their perceptions of the professional conference experience and bring it to the next class. "Maybe we could combine your reflections on the conference and develop an article to submit to the ASCD journal," I suggested. One teacher responded, "I'll try, but I'm a lousy writer."

During the next class I asked this teacher--the one who was reluctant and self-depricating--to read her paper. She described how at first the idea of presenting at a professional conference was extremely intimidating, something she did not want to do. And then she finally agreed to participate because everyone else had agreed to take part. When she actually arrived at the conference, she was even more hesitant. But after she gave her presentation, she felt that she had really accomplished something. Her experience was so compelling that it was used in an article written by class members which was published in the ASCD journal.

Case Two: The Utah Associates

The second case I describe is substantively different from the first. Rather than a deliberate attempt to experiment with and develop a new degree offering, the Utah Associates Program involves reading, observing schools, and discussing issues related to education in a democracy, the central mission of the partnerships associated with Goodlad's National Network for Educational Renewal. Noting the need for members of our Partnership to gain a deeper understanding of this mission, Patterson and Hughes (1999) describe the need for the Utah Associates Program as follows:

> Although we had been functioning for over a decade, relatively few people within our partnership could articulate the central ideas and purposes undergirding our activities. . . Too many colleagues in the schools and across the university thought that the partnership

was nothing more than the interest or preoccupation of a few senior administrators. It meant even less to the majority of university and partnership district personnel. (p. 272)

Due to these perceptions and the success of Goodlad's own associates program in which members of our partnership had participated, our governing board recommended in 1995 that we sponsor associates programs in our partnership. The board recommended two types of associates programs: one for key administrators in the Partnership, the other for teachers and professors. I participated in the first three semi-annual, two-day retreats for school and university administrators. At the present time I am participating in an associates program for teachers and professors. This program consists of four two-day retreats during an eight-month period, as well as four one-day visits to schools where participants can observe the link between the issues they are reading about and what teachers and students are experiencing in the schools.

The reading list for the 1998-99 cohort includes the following books:

(1) *Access to Knowledge: The Continuing Agenda for Our Nation's Schools* (Goodlad and Keating, 1994),

(2) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Putnam, 1993),

(3) *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* (Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik, 1990)

(4) *The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling* (Goodlad and McMannon, 1997)

(5) *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (Pipher, 1994),

(6) *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work* (Darling-Hammond, 1997)

(7)*There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing up in the Other America* (Kotlowitz, 1991)

In December of 1998 a survey was sent to the 116 educators who had participated in the teacher-professor associates programs the previous year. Of the 116 surveys distributed, 52 were returned (45%). The survey asked respondents the degree to which the associates program had

created opportunities for teacher renewal, altered their views of the role of education in a democracy, and influenced their professional practice. One partner school teacher who responded to the survey said that the Associates Program provided him "with an opportunity for (1) renewal, (2) sharing ideas, and (3) gaining knowledge that we are not the only school experiencing problems.

Another teacher said that program gave her a sense of renewal—"I hoped it wouldn't end. We have tried to continue this process in our grade level cluster groups. It is slow going, but I know it will be worthwhile."

One of the university professors responded:

> The Associates Program allowed me to (1) develop lasting professional relationships, (2) make connections with faculty members outside my department, and (3) gain a more comprehensive view of the role of public education.

A partner school educator spoke of how the Associates Program changed perceptions of higher education:

> It enlarged my network. Networking with reform leaders is one of my key roles. [It] gave me a chance to read more, ponder more, and explore ideas with top notch thinkers. Seeing a university and district collaborate so effectively renewed my faith in higher ed.

A partner school teacher described how the Associates Program causes one to think about broader educational issues:

> It gave me the opportunity to dialogue with other educators from different grade levels, with the district and with the state office. For the first time in thirteen years of teaching, I thought beyond myself and my practice and thought of the profession as a whole.

As a participant observer in the first leadership associates programs, and more recently as a member of a cohort that includes partner school teachers, education professors, and professors from the humanities, I believe that the programs are achieving their intended purposes. There is no question that this is a high risk professional development venture. The sessions are not the traditional "make and take" inservice meetings--sessions in which teachers develop materials that

they can use the next day in their class. Rather, the sessions emphasize discussions on the bedrock issues related to purposes of schooling in a democracy. These are not topics that typically draw large crowds to seminars in schools of education, but given the mix of participants--the difference between the roles that each plays in the education of teachers and the teaching of the young--the discussions are consistently rich and fruitful.

I believe that most participants in my cohort have also found the visits to urban schools to be particularly beneficial. These are times when members of the group can compare what they are reading with what they are seeing in actual practice. In most instances, members have remarked on the break between the ideal and the real--not only between what one reads and what one sees in a school, but between what a principal might describe and what is actually happening in the classroom. This obvious tension between what educators want to provide and what they are able to provide is a constant concern and causes observers to introspect about the match between their own beliefs and actions.

A Model for Individual and Organizational Renewal

Both cases provide evidence that collaborative reflection can change individuals and the organizations in which they work. The goal in Case One was to create a new graduate degree program. Although the program has not yet been implemented, discussions continue regarding the nature of the master's offerings in our school of education. These discussions have been influenced by the collaborative work of the group of teachers who enrolled in that first educational inquiry course. The schools in which the teachers worked supported their efforts to pursue the development of a new type of master's program. All who participated in the endeavor frequently expressed their perceptions of individual renewal, and then they each shared with other teachers--usually within their same grade--the new approaches they had developed.

The Associates Programs described in Case Two were also based on collaborative reflection--both on common readings and on observations of current practice in urban schools. An annual conference for those who have participated in the Associates Program during the past three years was held recently with approximately 350 in attendance. Among those who attended

were 40 from one school. The principal in this school asked his teachers if they would like to conduct their own program, and 40 agreed to participate. I mention this particular example because it shows how the Associates Program has spread, sometimes in unpredictable ways, from one person to an entire organization.

From the two cases and the literature on collaboration and inquiry, I suggest the model for individual and organizational renewal shown in Figure 1. The model is based upon the premise that collaborative reflection is a prerequisite to establishing a culture of inquiry and that a culture of inquiry is prerequisite to effecting individual and organizational renewal--an interactive process that moves back and forth. The individual makes personal changes in his or her practice which in turn change the way the organization functions. The individual then shares with another teacher the new idea or pedagogical method, and one additional teacher experiences change. The organization implements policies and procedures that foster such collaborative reflection, and both the organization and the individuals within it can experience renewal.

Insert Figure 1 about here

I have included nine ways of fostering collaborative reflection, which in turn will held develop a culture of inquiry and lead to individual and organizational renewal. This list of nine is not meant to be comprehensive, but I do believe that these are the most the most important ways educators can help collaborative reflection to flourish in their organization.

Build trust. Elsewhere I have suggested that the kind of relationships necessary for collaborative work of any kind are "relationships of mutuality" (Osguthorpe and Patterson, 1998, pp. 1-12). These are relationships in which neither party is superior, in which each is committed not only to the task at hand but to the people themselves.

Make time. When asked what they need to improve, teachers most commonly say, "more time." This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. In our partnership, we regularly allow pre-

Figure 1. Elements of individual and organizational renewal

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service teachers to take responsibility for the classroom for a period of time while the mentor teacher participates in a collaborative project.

Nurture questions. School leaders either foster or discourage question asking. But teachers themselves also influence other teachers' inclination to inquire. Everyone in the school must feel that asking a question about one's practice is a sign of courage rather than a sign of inadequacy. And all must believe that questions regarding organizational policies and practices are helpful and necessary.

Form groups. Collaborative reflection occurs best when participants form their own groups. In Case One the teachers volunteered to participate. There was no coercion of any kind. In the Associates Program, participants were invited to participate. In the most recent cohort, the Dean of Humanities asked each department chair to invite one faculty member to participate, and then the Dean invited the chairs themselves to join the Program.

Take risks. Collaborative reflection requires participants to take risks. In Case One I had to risk being on the teachers' turf throughout the experience, but they had to risk entering my world of professional meetings and publications. In Case Two arts and sciences professors had to risk not understanding all they might about public education, teachers had to risk not understanding all they might about the professors' disciplines.

Be patient. As Putnam (1993) has said, "The rhythms of institutional change are slow. Those who build new institutions need patience--this is one the most important lessons of the Italian regional experiment" (p. 60). So it is with school renewal. If participants expect immediate and dramatic results, they will be disappointed. This is the very reason most reform efforts fail.

Give gifts. Collaborative reflection demands that participants are willing to share, that they are willing to give what they are learning to each other. If the spirit of giving diminishes, collaborative reflection will eventually dry up and blow away. The persistence of teachers in Case One to keep on giving was for me a continual source of strength. The willingness of those in Case Two to attend 15 days of discussions and visits was also impressive.

Accept offerings. But as Putnam points out, the contributions we make eventually come back to us in various forms. This is what reciprocity is all about. Those who participate in collaborative reflection must not only be willing to give, they must also be willing to receive. This pattern evidenced itself in the Associates Program, as well as with teachers who were attempting to develop a new master's program. Collaborators did not expect gifts that others were incapable of giving. They accepted with grace whatever another was able to offer.

Recognize results. The annual conference for the Associates Program is one way in which participants can recognize the results of their efforts. This gives members an opportunity to share with each other the kinds of changes they are making in their own practice and in the ways their schools function. Whatever means is selected for recognizing results, it is an essential element of collaborative reflection.

Conclusions

I have attempted to describe the relationship between collaborative reflection, a culture of inquiry, and individual and organizational renewal. I have also described nine ways of fostering collaborative reflection. I am not suggesting that individual initiative has no place in the educational change process. To the contrary, collaborative work can never occur unless one person takes the responsibility to launch it. In addition, the private changes educators make without anyone else being aware of them will always be an important aspect of individual renewal. I do assert, however, that if those inside an organization never reach beyond their own boundaries, organizational renewal will not occur. And it is eventually the organization itself that must change if enduring improvements are to be experienced by those whose lives are affected by the organization.

By suggesting a model, I am not inferring that the phenomenon of collaborative reflection is a well understood. It is a complex activity, a relatively new way of conducting ourselves and the organizations in which we work. Thus it is my hope that greater attention will be paid to it as a process, that more will engage in it and learn from it, and that our learnings will lead to real improvements for students--the ones for whom the organizations were created in the first place.

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